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SUBJECT: MINISTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS OUTLINES HER PRIORITIES

REF: BAGHDAD 01006

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) In an April 22 meeting with Poloffs and ROL Coordinator, newly appointed Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Mikhail Salim said she perceives her Ministry has a role both in reducing human rights abuses and in educating the Iraqi public about human rights more generally. She explained that the ministry should "monitor" human rights abuses and work to prevent them, particularly abuses committed by government institutions. She also said it was important to establish a human rights public awareness campaign to indoctrinate Iraqis into a culture where human rights are understood and valued. Lastly, Salim stated that she wanted the ministry to take an active role in monitoring all proposed legislation for consistency with international standards for human rights.

¶2. (C) PolCouns expressed support for these mission goals and underlined the necessity of focusing on the problems of extrajudicial killings, torture and the judicial process within Iraq. When asked her opinion of the development of the Human Rights Commission (ref), Salim answered that she feared a weakening of the Ministry if the Commission is set up. She expressed concern that the Ministry and the Commission might have overlapping missions. If established, she opined, the Commission should be placed under the Ministry structure. PolCouns and ROL Coordinator emphasized the importance of an independent Commission empowered to conduct formal investigations and judicial hearings. They also urged that she work closely with the UN team as ideas about the role of the independent commission are further developed.

¶3. (C) Comment: Despite the same-day notification of her nomination and swearing-in, Salim has thrown herself into the work of the Ministry. After just one day at the Ministry, Salim seems focused on the job ahead of her. Her broad goals are well thought-out for a brand new minister with limited exposure to the field of human rights. Her hesitancy about the Human Rights Commission is understandable given her newness to the subject. We will have to see how she reacts to the work being done by the UN and British Embassy here; we will work with her to ensure buy-in to the concept of a strong commission.

¶4. (C) Bionote: Salim is a long-standing contact of the Embassy. Previously a member of the Transitional National Assembly (TNA), she is a city planner by training with a degree from Baghdad University. She lives in Baghdad with her husband and three children.
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